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Eastern Kentucky University, English Department

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AURORA



AURORA

1979

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AURORA

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The Ping of Weeping Clouds

*She stood under tin cans listening with quiet ears
To the ping of weeping clouds.
The children giggled and touched tongues
Upon the speeding carousel
While old men with crooked wrinkles and old women
With sagging breasts and swollen ankles
Sat on porch swings sorting out cob-webbed memories.
But Dad — he went to work and Mom — she baked the bread
While babies screamed and the youth
Kissed and drank cheap wine, smoked and dared to grow up.
But God, he stayed invisible while endless-endless-endless
Puffy white bearded clouds dropped tears
And still she stood
Under tin cans
Listening
With quiet ears . . .*

Angela Seibel

Ginger

*She stands at attention
When I arrive
Still promising
With big brown eyes
To go on Secret Missions
Fetch a ball
Touch the sky
But the creek is wider
And the hill is steeper
Than when she was younger
I don't ask anything of her
She looks at me sadly
As if she has something to say
But I can only look away*

Janet Bassford

Ruler Scrubbing Eternity

*The piercing loudness echoing eternity, being forever
wound and bound and locked to nothing.*

*That strange somebody smearing soapy suds scrubbing
the spotted space.*

*Ah, but the mellow grass whispering to the sand and
it did hear. It listened. I saw it.*

Mother was stretching crooked carrots creating carrot cake.

Poor mother.

Another voyage. I am to look down again.

I see the round and frowning tree trunk aging.

*Yet, the quite lovely lace coils itself
to be made for doiles.*

*Perhaps they will sit prim and proper upon Mother's dresser.
Shimmering shadows of the sun splashed upon the sea for an instant.*

Bow now to the jagged stairwell —

There she fell.

The autumn leaves upon the barren ground.

The cacti pricks and sticks.

She is queen.

Water falls drowning the rocks.

Swish, babble, babble.

Goodbye Mother.

Angela Seibel

Indian Summer

*Indian summer comes like a whisper,
warm and full of color.*

*It approaches on moccasined feet,
stealthily stalking the winter.*

*Its headress is full of yellow
and red, symbolizing its
struggle against the death of summer.*

*But, all things must pass,
and the struggle slowly ends in
a splash of warpaint,
waiting again for another year.*

Cheryl Ann Jones

Reflections

*Sometimes instead of looking into each other's eyes
We simply look in opposite directions
Searching for each other
With glazed eyes
And when we come to a mountain
You see a challenge and you see a barrier.*

*Sometimes when I can only look down
You bring me to a fun-house mirror
Here we laugh at ourselves.
I look up and see myself clearly in your eyes,
Even though when we come to a mountain
I still see a challenge
And you see a barrier.*

*Always it seems we are woven together
Like a fine rug — interlaced and inseparable —
Each diverse thread contributing to the design.*

Janet Bassford

*If sunshine doesn't make puddles
Then why is my sunshine
Making puddles in my eyes?*

Laura Cali

*Mantling weary souls from the day;
Night tucks around us,
Hiding lonely secrets from the sun.*

*Virgin mother shield us.
Protected from well lit eyes
We dare cry alone.*

Tomorrow is soon enough to smile.

Barbara A. Shepherd

Red Weeds

*Dead trees that are still burning
appear to be dominated
by blue clouds which suddenly turned quite vicious
in their exhaustive efforts.*

*Witness inner trees dying through overuse,
taxing grey brainwaves
and completing the cycle.*

*Internal messages which formerly melted into one another
at present sit quietly (rumination about the future).*

Anticipation fails to be aroused (and so dies).

*The uselessness of interaction prevails (termination
of the struggle).*

*Clusters of small red weeds have begun to grow which match
the hair colour of younger days,
while the mouth proceeds forward in constant motion,
yet remaining mute.*

*The clanging of shackled feet embraces the walls,
masking the snores of the living dead (the passing on).*

*All lie sleeping within empty spaces
as weed growth continues.*

Marc Williams

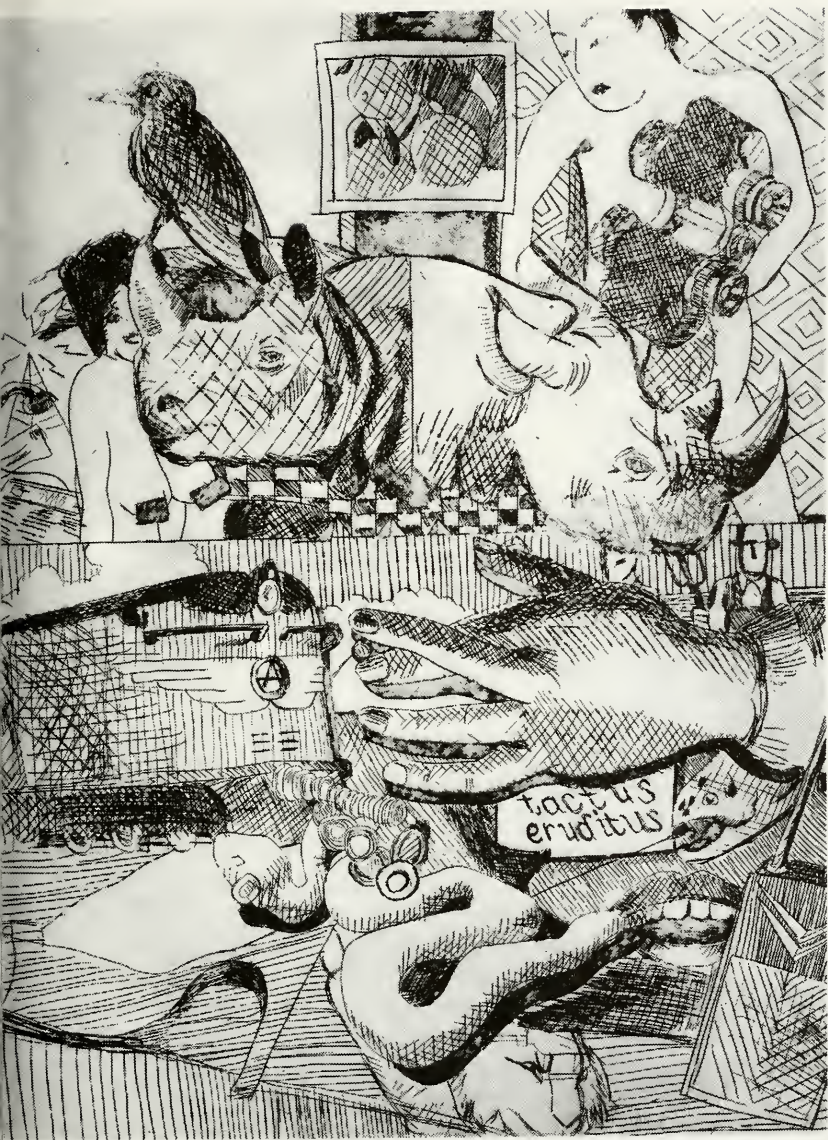
Thanatopnarcissus

*Naked, sitting all alone on the sharp, monolithic rock jutting high above
the ruins of ancient erosion, the cool wind of elevated heights rushes
through your hair and reminds you that no soul is immortal when
nature spreads her fingers across your fading world.*

*Reaching for eternity though, you choose to ignore the lesson nature
has taught you and you surrender your purity to the river of time — that
arrogant invention of man.*

*Then when things fall around you like torrential rains, you bang your
head against the soaring wall and curse the sky you never saw. Receding
into your inner self, you search for answers which are no longer there
and find solutions that do not threaten your self-exaltation.*

Barry Hall





A Tavern Tale

by Marcia Crawford

Characters

Socrates — the Greek philosopher

Euripides — the Greek dramatist

Gabriel — a leather dealer from Jerusalem

Tibon — Gabriel's nephew

Chloe — a tavern girl

Manager

Place: A tavern in Athens, Greece

Time: 430 B.C.

(The tavern is crowded, customers are seated at round tables, and the sounds of conversation and exotic music fill the air. The main entrance is on the right wall. The bar is on the back center wall. A small staircase ascends to the right of the bar. The manager, who is a huge, glum-looking man, is standing behind the bar keeping an eye peeled for trouble and making certain that the scantily clad waitresses are doing their best to keep the more affluent customers happy. From time to time the manager casts a particularly sour look toward a table near the center of the room where Socrates and his friend Euripides are seated. Socrates is especially conspicuous with his dirty threadbare tunic, unshod feet, and offensive body odor which is noticeable by the behavior of the customers seated nearby. They occasionally sniff the air, hold their noses, and take long draughts of wine in an attempt to somehow make the unpleasant odor go away. Euripides' appearance and aroma are somewhat more conventional than Socrates'. The two friends are engaged in what seems to be a casual conversation when Socrates suddenly stiffens, then interrupts Euripides.)

Socrates: What! Let me hear that once more.

Euripides: Yes, it's true. I had assumed you were aware of it, but on second thought I supposed you were away fighting for the safety of our glorious democracy when the ordinance was passed last week. The city council has decided that any religious idea discussed in public gatherings must first be certified by a board of censors that it is not dangerous to our society.

Socrates: Oh. And how does the council define a "public gathering" and a "religious idea"?

Euripides: They didn't attempt to define either. But they've been worried about so called "unorthodox religious ideas" for a long time. You and I both know that. I've been indicted on charges of impiety a

couple of times and I know the authorities have accused you of not recognizing the city's gods and introducing strange dieties.

Socrates: That's very true. How many times do I have to tell those people that I don't worship strange deities. In talking to people I've merely mentioned that I have a *daimon* which is simply a voice that restrains me and keeps me from doing unwise things. I don't consider it a divinity. I don't worship it! The only god I acknowledge is Apollo. Apollo has appointed me the mission of exposing men's ignorance to them, making them acknowledge it, and setting them on the path to goodness and truth. I've always held the belief of supremacy of the law above all personal consideration, but if the authorities try to prevent me from doing my duty by claiming that I've been influencing the public with unorthodox religious beliefs I'll just have to disobey the ordinance. I can't let anything interfere with my divine mission.

Euripides (*laughs sarcastically*) : Divine mission! Well, Socrates I admire your convictions, but I can't accept the existence of our host of silly, sinful gods as a reality. Of course I don't feel compelled to summon a public gathering and proclaim that idea on the street corners, but I do intend to continue exposing the stupidity of some of our attitudes about religion, war, and government through my plays. Maybe someday there will be some changes made.

(There is silence for a few moments. Both men look thoughtful. Socrates toys with some fruit that is in a large bowl at the center of the table. Euripides sniffs and becomes increasingly aware of his friend's odor.)

Euripides: Forgive me for asking, Socrates, but is it your usual custom to sleep in pig styes?

Socrates: Pig styes?

Euripides: I'll be blunt. You stink. It's been two days since you returned from the fighting. Couldn't you have managed to find some soap and water in the meantime. You're downright offensive.

(Gabriel and Tibon enter the room and stand near the door looking for a place to sit. Since the only empty places are to be found at the table where Socrates and Euripides are seated, they make their way toward that table. Tibon, a handsome young man of twenty-two leads the way. Gabriel, a dignified looking man in his early sixties, follows looking hesitant and disapproving.)

Socrates (*flustered but trying to maintain his dignity*): Euripides, I would never have thought that you of all people would insult a friend by —

Tibon (*interrupting*) : Pardon me gentlemen, but may my uncle and I join you? I'm afraid these are the only seats in the room that aren't taken.

Euripides: Please do if you think you can stand my odiferous friend here. (*gestures toward Socrates who looks hurt*)

Tibon (*brightly*) : Oh, no problem! (*he quickly seats himself next to Euripides, leaving his uncle to occupy the place beside Socrates*)

Gabriel (*trying to ignore Socrates' uncleanliness*) : Please excuse our intrusion and my nephew's boldness. We are leather dealers from Jerusalem and have just arrived in Athens. My name is Gabriel and this is my nephew Tibon. May I ask who you gentlemen are?

Socrates (*attempting to resume his dignity*) : I am Socrates and this is my friend Euripides the dramatist. Maybe you've heard of him. His *Medea* won a prize at the state dramatic contest last year.

Gabriel: I'm honored to meet you both. But I can't say that I've ever heard of either of you before.

Euripides: I really couldn't expect you to have heard of me. The play was such a small thing. It only took the third prize.

(*By this time, the manager of the tavern has taken note of Gabriel and Tibon and sized them up as wealthy foreigners. He sends Chloe, a well stacked girl of nineteen to take their orders. She gets a whiff of Socrates as she passes him to take Gabriel's order. With her nose pinched between her thumb and forefinger, she addresses Gabriel.*)

Chloe: What will you have?

Gabriel (*taken aback by her behavior*) : A glass of wine please.

Chloe (*to Tibon*) : And you?

Tibon (*giving her a slow once-over*) : Hmm, you look pretty succulent. Are you available?

Chloe (*matter of factly*) : Not for awhile yet. You'll have to settle for something else in the meantime.

(*Socrates and Euripides look at each other with raised brows. Gabriel gasps aloud.*)

Tibon (*grinning*) : In that case I'll have a glass of wine too. (*he pinches her rear and she returns to the bar*)

Gabriel (*infuriated*) : Tibon have you lost what little mind you have? You've always been a chaste, God fearing young man. What do you mean by making passes at foreign tavern girls?

Tibon: Oh come on Uncle Gabriel, let me have a little fun. You know what men do when they go on business trips.

Gabriel: I know what I do when I go on business trips. I attend to business affairs and that's it.

Tibon (*more earnestly*) : Uncle Gabriel I have been chaste for twenty-two years. I could tolerate it if I could just see some reward for upholding all our moral principles, but as it is I just can't stand it any longer. I want to live!

Gabriel: For God's sake restrain yourself. How can you talk this way in

front of strangers? Your love of God must come above all else and it's your duty to demonstrate your love for him by resisting evil and obeying his moral laws. As a Jew it is your mission to uphold the truth of God's law and teach it to mankind. Hold your sinful tongue and pray to God for forgiveness.

Socrates: Bravo, well said! By the way, who is your God?

Gabriel (*loudly*): The God of Abraham and Issac. The Lord God of Israel!

(At this outburst some of the customers turn around and stare, the manager's eyes narrow and he walks toward the table where the four men are seated.)

Manager: What's the trouble here? I'm trying to run a halfway respectable establishment. It's bad enough having this pig (*grabs Socrates by the shoulder*) stinking up the place, but having a foreigner in here proclaiming false gods is the absolute limit. If you want to try to convert people to your weird god's religion you'd better go get the approval of the city council and then do it out in the street. There's not going to be any religious gatherings held in this tavern and especially in the name of the god of some barbarian named Abraham.

Gabriel (*quietly, but deliberately*): The God of Abraham is the one true God. You may throw me in the lion pit as King Darius did Daniel, but you'll never get me to renounce my God!

Manager (*bewildered*): Listen, who said anything about throwing you in a lion pit? You can worship any god you want to when you're at home, but keep your religion to yourself while you're here.

(He walks back to the bar)

Tibon (*with mock admiration*): Wow uncle, I'm really impressed. Before our stay is over you'll no doubt have all of Athens bowing down to the Lord God of Israel. He's sure to reward you richly for all you've done.

Gabriel: Oh shut up!

(Chloe approaches with the drinks)

Chloe (*placing the wine in front of Gabriel*): I hear the manager jumped on you for talking about your religion. That's a subject you've got to be careful about in Athens these days. Haven't you heard about the ordinance the city council passed last week?

Euripides: Why does a girl of your age and line of work concern herself with matters of religion?

Chloe (*bitterly*): Well it just so happens that my father is chairman of the city council and was instrumental in getting that asinine ordinance passed in the first place. Not only that, he's also going to be on the board of censors.

(Euripides and Socrates look at each other in amazement.)

Euripides: Are you saying that Meletus, chairman of the city council of Athens, is your father!

Chloe: Yes, but he's not too proud of that fact right now. You see I stayed at home and played the part of a dutiful domestic daughter until I was eighteen, then I got sick of it all and left home to find freedom and most of all, to find myself.

Gabriel: Well young woman I guess now you see what misery results when you rebel against the wisdom of your parents. *(to Tibon)* Tibon, this girl would probably be willing to give a fortune to be accepted back into her home and lifted out of this degradation. This is the kind of ruin that sin and disobedience bring upon a person. Take heed!

Chloe *(in amazement)* : Ruin! What ruin? I've finally found what I was looking for. *(confidingly)* I'm fortunate enough to be a follower of the god Dionysus.

Socrates: You are one of the Bacchae!

Chloe *(laughingly)* : Yes. That makes you prick up your ears doesn't it? You know I fail to see what bothers people so much about the worship of Dionysus. My association with the Bacchae is what drove my father on his campaign to do away with religious ideas that he terms "dangerous to society."

Euripides: Tell me, are all the stories we Athenians hear about the Bacchae true? The tales have it that most of the followers of Dionysus are women who have abandoned their families and taken to dancing around the forest in fawn skins and ivy crowns. There are rumors of orgies, drunken revelries, and even human sacrifice.

Chloe: Sure. It's all true except the part about human sacrifice. I'm not really sure about that. I've never paid any attention to what we were sacrificing.

Socrates: And what good comes out of your revelries?

Chloe: It's fantastic! After performing the rituals I feel purified and reborn and what's really wild is that I feel like I've become part of Dionysus himself. It sure beats sitting at home and doing housework all day long. It doesn't bother anyone except a bunch of selfish men who get upset because they don't have their wives and daughters at home to boss around anymore.

(Gabriel rises)

Gabriel *(loudly)*: Tibon we've heard enough. Let's go thank God that he revealed himself to Israel and we don't have to suffer as slaves to such paganism as this.

Tibon *(grabbing Chloe)*: You go on. You can even go on back to Jerusalem without me. I'm staying here and finding out more about this paganism *(he lets Chloe lead him to the stairs)*.

Gabriel: Tibon come back! How will I explain this to your parents?

Socrates: Don't worry Gabriel, I'll stop him and make him realize how irrational this action is (*he follows Chloe and Tibon up the stairs and the manager takes off after him*).

Euripides (*shaking his head*): That Socrates. I wonder if he'll ever realize how blind human passion is.

(*Gabriel sits at the table, head in hands. In a few seconds the manager appears at the top of the stairs. He has Socrates by the scruff of the neck and when he arrives at the table he collars Gabriel.*)

Manager: I've had enough out of both of you. You're leaving right now (*he hauls both men to the door, kicks them through it, then bars it shut*).

There, that will keep out troublemakers. (*He sniffs the hand with which he grasped Socrates, looks disgusted, and walks back toward the bar.*)

(*Euripides is still sitting at the table lost in thought when Chloe's scream from upstairs brings all the conversation in the tavern to a hush. Following her scream, Tibon's voice is heard.*)

Tibon: But it was done when I was eight days old as a symbol of the covenant between God and Abraham!

Chloe: It's horrible! Stay away from me. I can't stand to look at you.

Tibon: Don't be afraid. It's cleaner like this.

Chloe: No!

(*Chloe rushes down the stairs screaming. Her clothing is awry and her hair is tangled wildly. The manager grabs her by the shoulders.*)

Manager: What's wrong? What did he do to you?

Chloe: Dear Dionysus! It's hideous. He's been mutilated. (*She runs toward the door, unbars it, and rushes out. The manager and all the customers except Euripides swarm upstairs. There is absolute silence. A few seconds later they all file slowly down the steps with shocked, angry expressions on their faces. They gather into groups and talk among themselves. Several of their remarks can be heard.*)

Voice 1: Foreigners! How disgusting.

Voice 2: It's barbaric!

Voice 3: Cleaner indeed. It's unnatural!

Voice 4: What kind of god requires them to mutilate themselves? (*The customers eventually resume their seats. Dancing girls are brought out in an attempt to calm everyone down. In a few seconds the curtain at the top of the stairs is slowly pushed aside and Tibon creeps softly down the steps. He tries to be as inconspicuous as possible, nevertheless several of the customers stare as he walks through, toward the door, and makes his exit. Euripides lifts his eyes from the wine glass and looks out the open door. It is apparent from the expression on his face that a thought has just occurred to him.*)

Euripides: Yes, why not? I think I'll write a play about the Bacchae.





A Day in the Life of Citizen C.

by Steve Cambron

*"Five years have passed; five summers,
with the length of five long winters! and
again I hear these waters, rolling from their
gutters."*

*(Wordsworth, "Lines Composed A
Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey")*

The sound of melting snow plopping into puddles reminded him vaguely of a similar Sunday; of several similar Sundays strung out through the freeze and thaw of five years. He could not distinctly remember any of these Sundays. It had probably been a lazy Sunday, and he had probably walked around more or less like he was walking around now — smoking a stale Tiparillo in an unbuttoned corduroy coat, with wet shoes. He could remember a Sunday with a Tiparillo and a chill from an open coat but he could not remember a Sunday with wet shoes. He could remember the silence, the slosh of melting snow, the mute mood of the afternoon, but he could not remember which Sunday. There was the Sunday he was living in now, and then there were others. There were Sundays of drinking coffee, there were Sundays of late sleep, there were Sundays in the library, and there were Sundays of worrying about Mondays.

Citizen C. stood on the curb smoking his cigar and watched the traffic light turn red in the absence of traffic. He made up this formula to categorize the Sunday which he was now living in:

"Snow thawing + the absence of traffic and joggers = this quiet Sunday." The thought occurred, however, after he had committed this equation to memory, that if he happened upon these same circumstances some time in the distant future of Sundays, then the two would be totally indistinguishable. That is, he would have no tangible data whatsoever of having lived this present Sunday apart from all others. C. quickly revised his formula. Therefore:

"Snow thawing + the absence of traffic and joggers + stale Tiparillos and open coat = this quiet Sunday '79."

C. imagined this formula as being recorded on tape in his own voice. It turned into an alchemic chant as he walked along, playing it over and over in his mind.

Memo: "Snow thawing + absence of traffic and joggers + stale Tiparillo and open coat = this quiet Sunday '79."

Memo: "Snow thawing + absence of traffic and joggers + stale Tiparillo and open coat = this quiet Sunday '79."

C. varied the rhythms and intonation to break the droning monotony. Occasionally he would even sing the formula in his mind, using the melody of a catchy popular song in order to better ingrain it in his memory. The formula was thus expanded:

"Snow thawing + absence of traffic and joggers + stale Tiparillo and open coat + Rod Stewart = this quiet Sunday '79."

It was on these kind of days — these slow thawing Sundays — that C. accurately perceived himself as living in a time warp. He felt that he had changed a great deal during his five year sojourn. He felt, conversely, that nothing had changed; that he had been frozen in the ebb and flow of time with his hands in his pockets, in a state of suspended animation. He was a suspended citizen, living in a suspended city, run by suspended policemen and suspended bureaucrats. There was, of course, the illusion of change — there was ample proof of that everywhere. They had put up a few new buildings since he had first taken up residence here. C. had originally mistook these buildings for irrefutable symbols of change, but he had learned in time, from equally irrefutable observations, that these buildings were only suspended buildings, built according to suspended blueprints.

The city had been so ingeniously constructed, and its inhabitants of such a suspended nature, that no catalyst could penetrate its inner-workings and effect a change. The air seemed to contain a built in defense system against such an invasion. And if some invading antibody did manage to slip in, it became paradoxically, because of the efficiency of the defense system, an agent of suspended change.

C. had been, in the past, an ideal, community-minded citizen. Somewhere along the line though something had jolted him out of his suspended state and he had been accidentally shocked awake. C. remembered the experience as like waking up from anesthesia and blinking one's eyes all alone in a blinding white room after a long and incredible surgery. The first time it happened it scared the hell out of him. C. immediately consulted the local self-help program and after some preliminary suspended guidance, managed to slip back under the magic effect of anesthesia before the trauma of waking had fully seized him. He thought himself fortunate in those days of ideal citizenship to be able to put himself under without any demanding effort. Then, it had seemed natural. It was the waking that was unnatural. It was the waking that caused the nightmare.

Another time, C. had been sitting in a restaurant sipping coffee and philosophizing with a waitress when an old man in a business suit beside him inadvertently turned and asked "And what are you going to do

afterwards?" C. usually produced a spontaneous anydone for this incurable question, but for some inexplicable reason — call it divine providence — he was caught hopelessly off guard. His response dwindled into a helpless stammer. He stared emptily into his coffee cup and thought of taking recourse in more suspended guidance. Afterwards, the question haunted him for days. C. avoided counseling but predictably fell back into his comfortable world of anesthesia.

Gradually however, C. began to notice faint traces of antibodies creeping into the fine air of his city. He established contact with these antibodies and through their influence eventually raised himself from the level of a suspended sleeper to the role of suspended agent of change. In this new role C., like others before him, succumbed to a new and quite ridiculous burst of idealism. Foolish meglomaniac that he was, C. undertook the role of catalyst and managed to achieve the status of a messiah of a suspended revolution. Nothing was changed, of course, except C's perception of himself. He forsook the role of catalyst and began devoting himself exclusively to probing new levels of awakesness. He had a very difficult time remembering what had passed before the period of great awakesness, his sensory impressions dulled by the years of anesthesia. To prevent such vital loss from occurring again C. exercised his mental capacities toward the sole function of preserving and categorizing his sensory impressions. Hence the elaborate formula:

"Snow thawing + absence of traffic and joggers + stale Tiparillo and open coat + Rod Stewart = this quiet Sunday '79."

C. felt that through such exercises he could evolve toward an ultimate state of awakesness. As a matter of fact, he was finding himself having occasional random flashes of ultimate awakesness, and they were occurring with increasing frequency. Soon it must inevitably follow that C. would be ultimately awake almost everyday of the week. And if not everyday, then at least could strive to attain a state of half ultimate awakesness. C. had taken careful note of this phenomena, filing it in his memory as:

C's Law of Probability: 7 days of ultimate awakesness x 52 = an irrefutable year of ultimate awakesness.

C. saluted the traffic light and stepped across the street. As he walked up some stone steps past a large building, he noticed some misspelled obscene graffiti crudely scrawled in chalk across the brick surface of the building. He grinned quietly to himself. "Unreal city, Vienna, London, Richmond, unreal."

The chime of bells in the clock tower interrupted his musings. The melody of *My Old Kentucky Home* clanged out loud and metallic, echoing between the buildings of the empty city. C. listened for the flat notes and immediately appended his formula.

Memo: "Snow thawing + absence of traffic + stale Tiparillo and open coat + Rod Stewart and flat bells = this quiet '79 Sunday."

C. laughed as he listened to the bells fight and struggle among themselves in a ludicrous effort to achieve harmony. C. laughed as only C. could laugh. He felt for a moment as if he had broken through the barriers of the time warp.

Snow Woman

*It must be ten below zero
and you sit naked in the snow
your head tilted back casually,
catching the full moon through the eaves.
In this cold the streetlights shudder
nodding and wobbling like vultures
the night, gaping like an old shoe
throws its long dark arms around you
the trees dance like witch doctors
raking the air with clawed fingers.*

*I curl up in the sheets for the wind
as leaves skitter end over end —
like glass sheaths crashing together
in a desert of white weather.
It is inconceivably cold
and you sit naked in the snow
a kind of childless Madonna
a kind of queen Victoria
still as an unruffled feather
legs open, hugging the weather.*

Steve Cambron

The Ballad of the Old Nun

*rasp of bobwire
widow's falsetto
hands of hellfire
swinging god's gavel
glaciated stone face
look of laser
warm heart cold heart
Puritan pleasure
smile of crucifix
backbone of butress
low heels black robes
twitch of arthritis
hymn book pitch pipe
pump organ bellow
tight-lipped squint-eyed
yardstick conductor
beads of rosary
dog-eared bible
catechism chorus
St. Jona's survival*

Sing Alleluia!

*The old nun walked like a bow-legged crow
travelled with a cane wherever she'd go
slow as a wheelchair, slow as a sundial*

*Her hands were crinkled and curled like spiders
she had varicose veins under her black hose
old as the dustballs glued to the register*

*Her mouth was mean and closed like a lasso
round as a bubble ring blowing hosannas
round as the halo over St. Michael*

Sing Alleluia!

*For the old nun older than old
wobbling on the ice sheets in the parking lot
coughing up the cold wind's snow*

*For the old nun creeping alone
with a prayer and a banister*

and a smile from St. Christopher

*For the old nun who refused
who hammered and pelted and threw things
who armwrestled with Lucifer*

Sing Alleluia!

*For the old nun still going
without legs or cane or clank
down the morning corridor like an umbrella's shadow*

*Savonarola and the gang
would have loved you
I think I did too old nun.*

Steve Cambron

Running to you,

I fell.

There is no pain?

(The memory of another taught me how.)

This time the ground was not so far.

It rose to meet me,

cradling me.

Barbara A. Shepherd





*ringing phones and
other busy signals*

*waiting
leaning against the outside of the phone booth
fidget
watching that lady across the street
 out of the corner of my eye
"maybe they got home . . .
i'll try just once more"
my dime slides through the ever-hungry coin slot
telephone ringing on the other end
where are they?
c'mon c'mon
looking down at my feet
answer the phone
damn it
kicking the door of this glass box
unheard, unanswered, the phone rings at my house
angrily slamming down the receiver
shoving my hands deep into my pockets
stepping out of the phone booth
wait —
stepping halfway back into the booth
take the phone off the hook and leave it gently
 swinging by its stiff metal cord
now another phone is busy
 being unanswered
i'll keep my change too mr. bell
nice doing business to you*

Lesia Kirsch

Caryn

*Beneath those frequent smiles and grins
Was a lonely girl who could never win
She knew no one would understand
Her want for a harsh reprimand
Or discipline from dad or mother
Instead of love, she'd just get another
Outfit, album or some other selection
To put beside her vast collection
There was never a feeling of closeness or belonging
Just cheating and lying and constant wronging
When holidays came they weren't full of fun
Just mother and dad on the continual run
But, not forgetting their lovely at home
No, they'd never leave their daughter alone
They'd give out the keys to the new Cadillac
And say, "don't wait up, 'cause we'll soon be back"
Till one night when they stumbled back
Their daughter was gone and had left no track
Ignoring their worries, knowing she'd be around
Thinking by morning she would have been found
How could they have known, unless they had bothered to care
That their daughter, with everything, would never be there.*

Laurie Ries

Haikus

*Brittle and dried leaves
Curling withered old hands of age
grasp the wind yet fall*

*Footfalls on wet earth
traces of man's onward journey
trample budding life*

Allison Rene Kaiser

Dawn

Shadows of dreams
 falling out of my head
Casting grey
 around my mind
Blocking out
 present thoughts, future hopes
Until the spiral
 leading up to my mind
 fans out wide
And into the darkness
 floods the light of realization
Casting all grey
 away.

Allison Rene Kaiser

Plaid cement
No chalk in sight
Dusty window
Dark days, sunny nights.
Orange hair,
On the stage.
Your battery's all run down,
Blue jeans, classrooms.
I can't stand,
That book in your hand.
I don't care,
You don't dare.
Come back from the west coast,
My lost girl.

Matthew A. Painter

A Past Future

*She comes in silence
and stands in the shadow of my loss.
She seems confident, almost accustomed, patient.
Waiting there amid the frustration,
and the helplessness,
and the why,
which loom so obvious and overpowering to me,
she is not oblivious —
not intimidated —
perhaps only well acquainted with sad.
Measured steps bring her closer.
She walks slowly,
deliberately,
through shattered pieces that shrink away
into tiny fragments.
some vanish into her shadow —
a shadow which falls long and dark behind her
— maybe to hide many broken pieces of her own.
She lifts me carefully to unsteady feet
and we leave in silence.
I walk uncertain;
but an occasional glance behind
shows my loss becoming part of the shadow
we both now cast.*

Lesia Kirsch



What, Me Worry?

by D. Marie Tucker

He was twenty-eight when he made that first jump. She didn't want him to — she never wanted him to again after that first one, but there he was, fifteen years and several hundred jumps later. Of course, she had gotten used to the idea, but she had never really liked it. That's what she kept telling herself all afternoon, anyway, that she didn't like it.

She watched him off and on, periodically surveying the crowd and comparing herself and him to the others around them and wondering about the both of them. He wasn't worried; he never worried. "Good jumpers don't have to worry!" he'd say, and then he would tell that old (old, *very* old) story of his first jump. His parachute hadn't opened, and he had kept a cool head and managed to open his reserve and save himself. She could hear him now: "I realized something wasn't quite right and thought I'd better pull my reserve. Good thing." Then he'd shrug and with a "See? Good jumpers don't have to worry!" he'd go back to packing his chute and she could never get in a answer. But she was used to it. Maybe she would learn to like it, but she didn't really think she would.

So there they were in Springville, Tennessee, at the Springville Jump-In, one of the largest sport parachuting meets in the United States. They were only two of the group of about thirty: husbands, wives, girlfriends, all of whom had been falling out of airplanes or watching each other fall out of airplanes together for those past fifteen years. They were but a tiny little pocket in the overall scheme of things, thirty among three thousand, all waiting to be taken up into the sky by the twenty or so airplanes and dumped out to float back to their waiting lovers there on the ground.

Despite her constant worrying, she was having a pretty good time. This weekend wasn't like all her other times, sitting in the sun by herself, fighting sweat-bees by the corn fields and waiting to go home. This time there were people, thousands of people, and parachutes in squares and triangles, not just the old-fashioned round canopies she was used to seeing, and no bees, and not even a stalk of corn close enough to spit on. It was really a change. She bought herself a T-shirt, then another, and one for him, and a couple for her daughter (She was nineteen. She liked the idea of having a sky-diving father. Imagine!), and finally she bought six all together. And all the food: hot dogs and barbeque chicken and greasy hamburgers and stringy pizza, all junk to be sure, but it was fun to eat, and she really like wearing those blue jeans, even if she did think she was a little past all that. But she still worried a little about his jumps. There *were* over a hundred men in the sky at a time, and they were all

packing in an awful hurry, and . . . oh, well. After all, he *was* good. So she settled back with Jack's wife, and the other Jack's wife, and Steve's girlfriend, a sticky piece of chicken, a camera to take some pictures for that crazy daughter, and relaxed.

He was glad she was enjoying herself. He watched her out of the corner of his eye as he checked his reserve out and "Granny" checked out his back-pack. He had been waiting all day for the inevitable cry to go home, but it hadn't come yet. He knew she hated going jumping, but this time she had insisted on coming with him. The quick thought that she was beginning to like the idea flickered past in his eyes, then he thought "No" but at least maybe she wasn't worrying so much. Well, that was something. He took a last look, waved and grinned, and took off at a trot for the plane.

He cut a wonderfully remarkable figure, five-foot-eight and completely engulfed in the new red coveralls, which, besides her, were his prized possession. The latest style, with arms and legs made wide like wings to catch the wind and slow his fall, they were a new acquisition, but he still used the old round canopy, his Para-Commander. Sitting there in the open door of the plane he felt a sort of attachment to the chute; he knew he would be as accurate on his landing with that old thing as many of the younger guys with the new square canopies were.

She shaded her eyes and watched for the plane. She knew he would be first out of the plane; the spotter was always the first out and he was always spotter. She laughed a little when she thought of a few of the other guys in the club spotting. The jumpers had been carted back from over ten miles away from the target at times. He never made bad spots though; that's why they always asked him to take the job. It was even kind of an honor.

She heard the engine, but it still had not come into sight. A quick cry of "Over there!" and a pointing finger brought her attention to the crepe paper streamer, then the plane. They should be jumping on the next pass, so she focused on a wide area and awaited the invading hoards.

He watched the yellow paper drift toward the ground, figured the wind direction ("It's blowing *that way*"), and prepared to tell the pilot to cut the engines. Then he lost Jack.

He didn't have time to wonder where Jack went so suddenly; he was thrown from the plane as it dropped sharply and headed for the ground. He pulled his ripcord and then tried to see what had happened. He saw a half-opened canopy which had come out of its pack in the airplane. It had been blown out the door and it had dragged Jack out and straight back through the tail of the plane, tearing away about half of the elevator and leaving him dangling lifelessly at the end of the risers.

The plane was diving toward the ground, the other eleven men trying to get to the door to get out. He counted, one by one, until they all were accounted for.

She saw the first man out, she saw him take part of the plane with him, and she saw him heading toward the ground under a collapsed canopy. She didn't see the others till Jack's wife saw them. Then she realized that under an identical nylon cloud, another man was straining for the ground. Neither of the women knew which was alive and which had just hit the runway.

A huge mob surrounded the place where Jack bounced. It wasn't pretty; most all of them had seen it before.

He got there as the ambulances arrived. She was trying to get his attention from across the field, but he just stared at the ground as one of the younger jumpers looked on. The boy was shaking his head and repeating, "He was *good* — he was really *good*."

Silence of the City . . .

*The rustle of the leaves on the trees in the wind,
The song of the robin announcing winter is at end,
The chitter and chatter of the squirrels at play,
The call of the crickets at the end of the day,
The croak of the frog like a mighty bullhorn,
The crow of the rooster at first sign of morn,
The trickling of water as it swiftly moves on,
The quacks from the ducks as they play on the pond,
The hoot from the owl on a long winter's night,
The buzzing of wings of the bees in their flight,
The low hum of snakes as they warn us by hissing,
The city so silent, for these sounds are missing.*

Paul David Clere

Summer

*I sit and cry a little,
and I cry a little bit.*

*A cloud drifts through
and over
and around,
and pretty girls lay under the sun
shiny brown;
they point and whisper
(but not too loud).*

*But for a half
of what went before
a year or more ago.*

*No more.
Louder, it rises in in deafened ears;
rises with professors' voices
rising, rising — Rising lower so . . .*

*To see the sound
in clouds
that rain down tiny little drops
on peeling cheeks
then squeeze through a ray
to turn her legs
shiny brown.*

D. Marie Tucker

To Make A Difference

by Shelby White

If he could have found his boy, he would have never had to have taken the horses to the stable. The boy, however, had somehow managed to sneak away from his master so the innkeeper, grumbling curses beneath his breath, had to leave the warmth of the large room where men and women were laughing and drinking and the musicians were playing. He lit a torch, stepped into the cool, starry night, and led the horses of the two new-comers down the alley which ran between the tightly packed houses.

To take the horses to his stable, the innkeeper had to lead them down the alleyway, around the bend of his house, and up a steep, inclining pathway; the inn was built against a hill and the stable was a cave with its mouth covered by a shack which served to enlarge the room-sized, low ceilinged grotto. The horses, which were tired and sweating from a full day's ride with men on their backs, were docile at first. They began to buck, however, when they saw the steepness of the path which was barriered on either side by the hill and the inn all the way to the top of the pathway. While trying to pull the horses up the hill with firm commands, the innkeeper had accidentally jerked the torch close to the horses' faces. The horses reared in rebellion. The man finally managed to get the door of the stable opened, and by coaxing the animals with his back to the entrance, the horses slowly entered.

The innkeeper was completely taken by surprise when he turned around and saw a thin, broad shouldered, young man whose short, narrow beard indicated the days of his youth were not too far behind him. The young man was standing near the back of the stable with a long staff poised in his hand. By his stance and the manner in which he held the staff, the innkeeper judged the young man knew how to use it. The innkeeper let go of the horses' reins. He held the torch. He judged that if it came to a fight, the fire would give him the advantage.

Then in the flickering shadows of his torch, the innkeeper saw the girl. She was young, but not so young that she shouldn't be married. She was lying in the hay beneath a shepherd's blanket in an empty stall behind the young man. She looked very frightened.

"This is my stable," the innkeeper said. "You'll have to take your woman somewhere else, boy!"

"My wife is in labor," the young man said, still holding his place with the staff. "And she needs a place to have her baby."

The man took another look at the girl. He could not tell if she were

pregnant beneath the blanket or not. But he said, "So you use that as an excuse to trespass."

"You said your inn was filled," the boy replied.

The innkeeper was taken back for a moment. He suddenly recalled that he had sent these two away earlier in the evening.

"Then go someplace else!" the innkeeper answered.

"We did," the young man said. "But they were filled too."

"Well you can't stay here!" the innkeeper replied angrily.

"You said the inn was full before," the young man answered calmly, "but you are just now bringing in horses. Perhaps you can make room for a woman in labor."

The innkeeper looked at the peasant and said, "No! People are sleeping on the floor now."

"We could sleep on the floor."

"There is no more room."

The young man took a deep breath and said, "Then could we stay here?"

The innkeeper calculated quickly. If he said no to this rude boy's request, he might very well have to go against his staff before he could evict him. The prospect was not appealing. If he let the couple stay, he could make some extra money but the boy might steal the animals.

"Do you have money?" the innkeeper asked.

"We have some money," the young man answered.

"For the two of you to stay here, it will cost you a shekel."

"That's outrageous!" the young man exclaimed.

"You can always go someplace else," the innkeeper said with finality.

The young man started to protest but the girl said in a voice, weak, tired, and full of pain, "Give him the money, Joseph. It won't be long now."

Joseph reached into a pouch he was wearing across his shoulder and flipped the innkeeper his coin. The innkeeper caught it, put the torch into a holder on the wall, picked up the reins of the horses, led the animals into separate stalls, and put a bale of hay into their troughs.

The young man asked him, "Do you know where I can find a midwife?"

"Do you need one?" the innkeeper asked as he took the saddle off the horse.

"It is the Law!" the young man answered, for the first time showing a hint of anger in his voice.

"There is an old woman down the street to the left as you face the inn; it is about six doors down. She has several potted plants in front of her door. Her rates are reasonable."

"Go to her, Joseph," the girl said. "And please hurry."

The young man looked with mistrust at the innkeeper. The girl said, "Don't worry, Joseph, I am protected."

The young man knelt down to his wife, wet a rag with the water from a goatskin bag, wiped the perspiration from her brow, mumbled that he would not be long, got up, and hurried out.

The girl looked at the innkeeper and asked, "May I have a fire?"

The innkeeper said, "No, it would set fire to the hay."

"Then could you move the torch closer to me?" she asked hopefully.

"I need it to see," was his answer.

The girl was quite. Slowly, she began to mourn.

"Don't worry," said the innkeeper, still keeping busy with the horses. "Naomi is a good midwife."

"Did she deliver your children?" the young woman asked.

"She delivered my son," said the innkeeper dryly.

"How old is your son?" the woman asked.

"He's not," said the innkeeper. "He's dead."

"I'm sorry," said the woman. "I will pray for your grief."

The innkeeper looked at her with anger. He did not want this insolent girl's pity.

"He was young and foolish," the innkeeper explained. "He hit a tax collector and didn't kill him. The Romans crucified him for it."

The girl was silent for a moment and said, "I am going to have a son."

The innkeeper grunted and said, "How do you know it won't be a girl?"

The girl said, "I know."

The innkeeper said, "It won't make any difference. The Romans will crucify him as well."

"My son will make a difference. That is why God is sending him."

"Oh," the innkeeper mocked, "Will he be a prophet?"

"Perhaps," the girl guardily answered. "But the reason God sends us children is to give mankind another chance. Every newborn child has the potential to make the world either a better place or a worse place with his life. Perhaps one day God will send a child who will make a lot of difference."

"That's woman's talk," the man said. "No child makes a difference. Just look at their hungry faces and you'll see that — and your child won't make any difference either."

Perhaps not to you," she said as a spasm of labor came upon her, "but to me, he has already made all the difference in the world."

At that moment, the young man came into the stable with an old,

crippled woman, bent over from the weight of her years. The crippled woman muttered a God's blessings to her neighbor and under her breath, she began uttering prayers for a safe delivery. She began to attend to the girl and from the large leather bag she was carrying, she unpacked the instruments of her trade. Just getting in the way by his attempts to help, the young man began cleaning hay out of a dirty trough. It occurred to the innkeeper that they would use it for a crib.

The innkeeper finished with the horses and looked unnoticed upon the others' activity. Thinking about the girl's last words, he thought, ("No girl, you're just fooling yourself. If your son comes to be worth anything at all, the Romans will find some excuse to crucify him just like they do all the others. When they drag *him* away, when they give *him* a mockery of a trial, when they beat *him* and nail *him* to a wooden beam, when *he* has to wiggle like a pinned insect for every breath *he* tries to take, when *you* look on and are totally helpless to stop *them*, then, it won't make any difference at all.)

Feeling like he had had the final word, he slipped out of the stable and into the cool, night air. Music and laughter were coming from the inn below. Unwilling to return just then, he took a few steps away from the stable and breathed in a deep draught of fresh air. Between the house and the hill, he could not see many stars. The one he could see was brighter than any he had ever seen before. It was almost directly overhead.

Shortly, he heard the smack of a palm against flesh and a cry from a newborn baby. Perhaps he was fooling himself, but the noise from the inn had died down and he thought, but he was not sure, that he heard a soft strain of music coming from a distance, from the hills where the local shepherds tended their flocks.

What he did hear was beautiful. He could not tell if it was the music of voices or that of instruments. It seemed to linger in the air, so the music that was once heard, was not forgotten. It stayed and mingled with each new note.

The music was both pleasing and haunting. It was filled with celebration and wonder, yet it contained an undercurrent of sadness. The baby's cries blended into the music and from the child's single theme, millions of variations were made. After hearing that music, no other music would ever satisfy the innkeeper again.

The innkeeper wondered if the woman had really had a son.



Triangle Plus One

*I pick you
You pick him
He picks her
She picks me*

*She bores me
She hates him
He woos her
You wound me*

*If you'll pick me
I'll pick you
She'll pick him
Or else be blue*

Shelby White

Frustrated Poet

*Words:
constantly creeping
into my mind,
playing with my thoughts —
a veritable army,
orderly lines of perfect meter,
waging war
with my sanity
until I can
rush to the paper
and write them down.
But by the time
that hand meets pen
and pen meets paper,
they refuse to be preserved,
and once again
they scurry off,
laughing at the havoc
they have played
upon my mind.*

Donna L. Roberts

Imagings by Starlight

*You Star,
The one that fell,
Did your fellows cast you out?
Were the other gods envious
Of your place and power,
And thus, made an end to your position?*

*Did you volunteer to leave,
To come to earth,
To walk with man,
Know his problems, pride, and pain?
Did you come like Prometheus
To bring a new fire to man?*

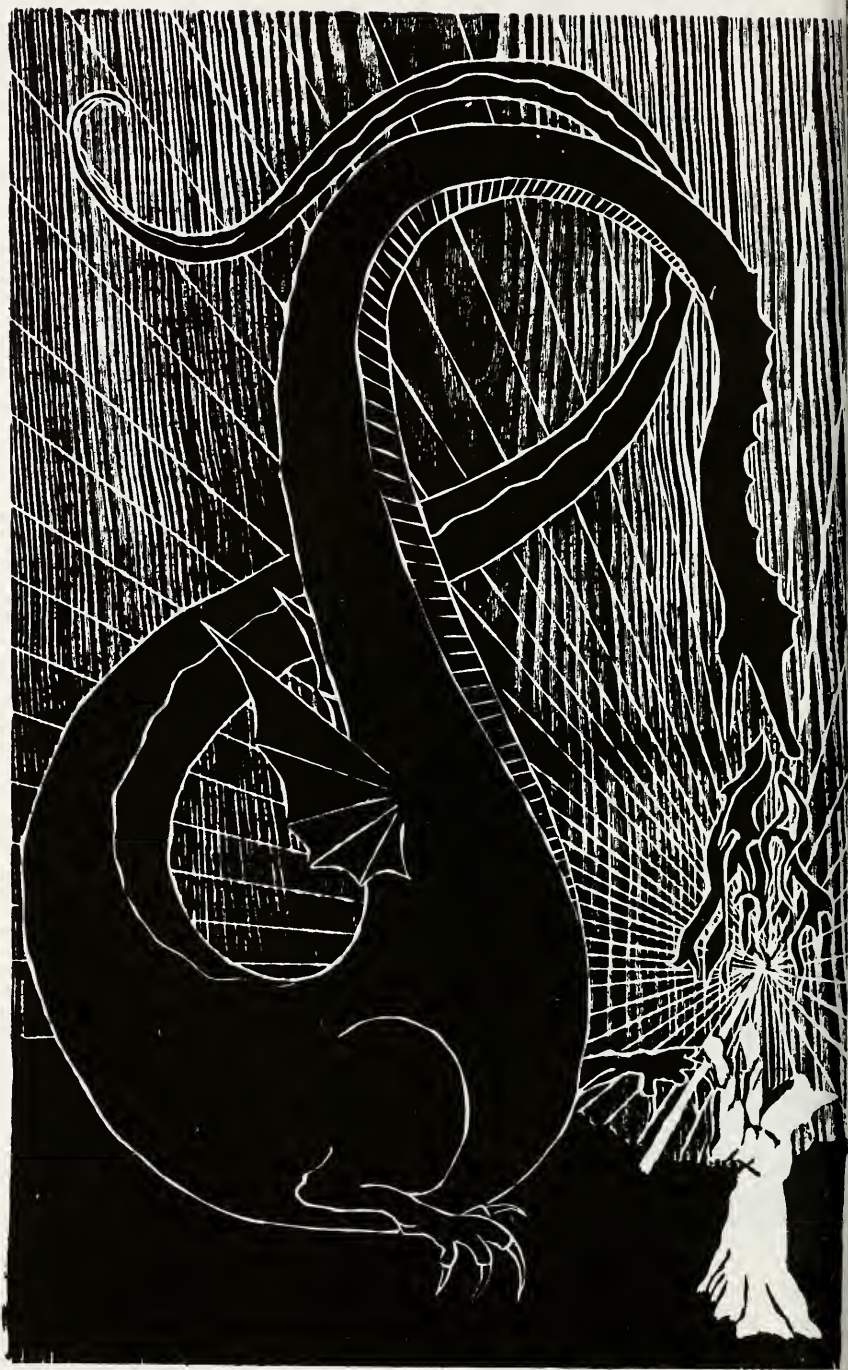
*Or did you escape?
Did they keep you there
Imprisoned in your orbit?
Did that cruel god Gravity
Force you to circle the earth
In an endless odyssey?*

*Did you choose to escape
From the wilderness of space?
(Broad is the prison that has no walls
But lonely is the solitary of eternity)
Did you pick tonight to jump the wall,
To come plumaging to earth?
Is there a Warden with guards and hounds
Who knows of your mad dash?
Will He come and get you
And put you back in jail?*

*Or, perhaps
— Dare I think it true —
I alone saw you fall
On a clear dark peaceful night?*

Shelby White





Fragments

*My pen is dry
The feather carries no ink
to empty parchment
from empty heart
For the old man left a rainbow
on the step beside the milk-box.
He stole my Sunday paper
and hobbled down the street
to an imaginary train.
Again, today the screen-door
moaned with the morning wind
Brisk as winter
Coming fast.
And I shivered
As I put out the blood and barley
and other fragments
of my life.*

Earlene Davison

Lonely Men

*Lonely men live in boxes
made of styrofoam and tears.
With years and years
of stifled dreams
buried in bitter hearts.
Life is like a hidden song
that cannot find its word.
Like butterflies that lose their wings
and senile old men
who stand in the way of here and there
Never knowing just where to go.
Well I guess you ought to know by now.
Life doesn't last forever,
No . . .
Nothing lasts forever.*

Earlene Davison

The Search for the Holy Girl

*Nearly a year has gone
Since you first left my side
Friends at your office
Lovers late at night
You held me close
And kissed me twice
But for lack of virginity
You erase it from sight
And search for the Holy One
The girl dressed with lace
White as the teeth
That shine on her face*

Daphne Beth Greene

The Racks

*I shoot no bull
I tell no lies
All I do is socialize.*

*I know the truth
I have the facts
I put no one on the racks.*

*She had a choice
She made it wrong
Where now does she belong?*

*I shoot no bull
I tell no lies
All I do is socialize.*

Gayle Davis

Waves

*They always come and go
Sometimes they are just there
Quietly changing on and off
Being seen but never offering
Beautiful and still.*

*Waves start big
Rolling wildly toward the shore
Losing size but gaining personality
All ending the same,
White foam on the beach.*

*At times they come
Never wanting to go.
Shining and bubbling
Splashing and roaring
Mixing with delight.*

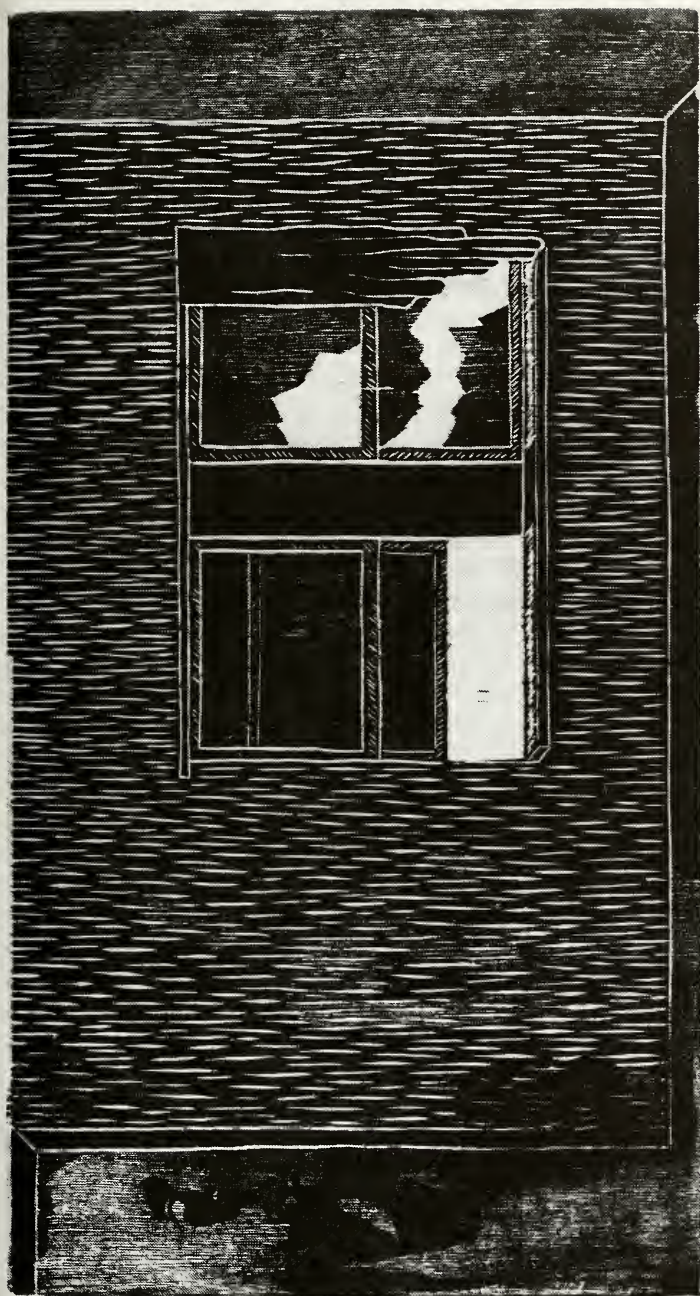
*These waves run on
Like two happy dolphins
Running together
No longer two
But a beautiful pair.*

Cheri A. Arave

*I am as
The needles
Of the evergreen
Enclosed
By a thick layer of ice
Trapped
Waiting for the sun*

Daphne Beth Greene





The Bogus Swell

by Paul Hicks

The swell grew a few miles or so just off the shoreline. It was a rocky shoreline with large boulders jutting up in peculiar shapes. Lifting up from the sand as high as sixty feet, they ran very near the water's edge before thinning out into beach. Beyond these lay the short hills with their bold green tops which glared constantly over the sea.

The grey sands scattered easily to the wind as the storm sent its first warnings to the houses atop the coastal hills. It built thickly but slowly from a tuft of darkness into a black whirling top, spinning gently toward the shore.

Barnes and Loyd sat on the porch of the shack playing checkers on a three-legged table. Barnes was winning and feeling quite good about it. He laughed a little and the table shook. Loyd smiled lightly and moved one of the red checkers along the board.

"Looks kinda bad, don't it," he said.

Barnes shook his head glumly, "Has for years now."

"But not like that," said Loyd as he moved a red checker and pointed out towards the swell.

The two of them stared at the black clouds for a while. The swell still hang several miles out over the blue water, but had edged apparently closer.

"Yeah, a bad looking storm at that," said Barnes, "It'll be good to sleep in tonight."

"Never did care for that," returned Loyd moving a red checker one square closer to the king's row. "Funny how some people like to sleep during storms. But not just sleep like everybody else. Spend all their time listening to the rage of it, then just before it seems like it's gonna break, just roll over and fall off to sleep. Mabel loved to you know, she'd loved this kind of night, with the thunder and all. Of course she woulda liked to be at home so she could sleep under the tin roof."

"And the waves hitting the rocks," added Barnes, "Jewell liked that."

Loyd jumped one of the red checkers over a black one and removed it from the board. The taste was gone from the game, however, so he slipped it quietly to the edge of the table and dropped it into the cigar box. They played on silently.

A car, loaded with boxes and bags piled haphazardly in around the driver, came whining down the hill past the shack. It tossed up clouds of dust as it rocketed past the porch. The air blew in off it shaking the table and nearly upsetting the checker board. Barnes threw up his hand at the

driver as the car went quickly by.

"Young Findlay boy," he said.

"In a bit of a hurry," muttered Loyd.

"Just like the old man used to be," said Barnes.

Loyd's gaze followed the car as it moved along the roadway out of sight. "Yeah, but that young one ain't right and never has been," he said.

"Probably just storm fever," said Barnes concentrating on the checker board and talking at the same time, "Lot of people take to the fever in a bad swell. Jewell died in a storm. Odd, that was, seeing how he loved to sleep while it was stormin'."

A stroke of lightning cut across the skyline well out over the water. The glistening black clouds had lost a bit of their luster as the evening burned close into dusk and the light grew dim.

"Getting cold," said Loyd.

"Must be the storm. Always gets colder in a storm," said Barnes glancing out at the horizon.

"I guess so," said Loyd, following Barnes' gaze out toward the well.

A cockroach crawled out of a crack in the outside wall of the shack and circled around on the porch floor weaving in and out around the legs of the table. It swerved around the porch floor, testing the cracks between the boards. It crawled over Barnes' bare foot and he shook it away. Landing on its back the two men watched it for a while, kicking and struggling to right itself. It did so shortly but Loyd crushed it with the sole of his shoe before it had the chance to escape.

"The storm drives them out of the walls and makes them crazy," said Loyd contemplating the crushed roach. "Does a lot of things that way. Snakes and cows and horses and things. Lots of things."

"And it gets worser when the swell gets closer," he continued.

The storm was nearer to the shore by now and the waves began to react to the wind by falling in irregular patterns. The wind was stronger also, and it rocked the three-legged table for a moment before Loyd put his knee against the legless side.

Another car came speeding along the roadway past the shack and was soon followed by another. The dust had begun to collect moisture from the wind and fell easily into a thicker, stable state. Still, however, it tumbled up around the wheels of the cars as they went hurtling by. Barnes, sitting on the side of the table facing down the hill, waved warmly as each of the two cars passed.

"Wonder where everybody's goin'," he asked, moving one of the black checkers within three squares of the king's row.

"Down towards Masonville. Must be having a fair or something," said Loyd.

Another car came down the narrow roadway.

It was growing steadily darker now, past the dusk and into the night. Barnes lit a lantern and hung it from a nail on the porchpost. The wind knocked it against the post and swayed it back and forth like the turret of a lighthouse. The swell came closer to the shore with the darkness and salty smell of the ocean growing thicker. It stirred the grass that grew up around the edge of the shack. The green clumps of grass were now mingled with the dark night and moved in time with the lantern and the crashing of the waves.

At the crest of the hill a beam of light broke into view as yet another car came speeding down the road. It careened around the sharp turn just above the shack and slid sideways in the loose dirt. The driver quickly straightened the path of the vehicle and brought it to a halt in front of the shack. He rolled down the window next to the porch and asked hurriedly, "Which way to Masonville?"

Barnes looked at the stranger for a moment, then at Loyd before answering, "Inland on this road right here. Just straight on in."

The young man in the car began rolling the window back up.

"What's the big hurry?" asked Loyd, "Masonville is a long way inland, it ain't goin' nowhere tonight."

Barnes smiled as the young man in the car looked queerly at the two of them. "You mean you don't know about the hurricane?" he blurted at Barnes.

Loyd and Barnes both tore into laughter. "Hurricane!" barked Barnes, "There ain't no hurricane coming boy, just a storm to sleep good in." He laughed heavily, "Just a little swell, boy, to sleep good in." He laughed. "A little swell to hit the tin roof is all." The boy glared strangely at the two of them, then, rolling up the window, sped quickly on his way inland.

"Must of never seen a swell before," said Loyd. When they finally stopped laughing and returned to the checkerboard the wind had begun to come in haughtily from the sea.

Out behind the shack Barnes' animals stirred as pellets of rain began to fall onto the tiny tin roof of the goats' shed. The rain picked up shortly and began to run down along the thatched roof of the shack and fall off onto the lantern. It sizzled for a second, then went up in a haze of steam.

Time passed, the storm grew, and the game progressed.

Loyd moved a checker.

The lantern jumped even faster than before as the swell moved fully into the land and the rain began to pelt everything with gigantic drops. The wind blew in short, rapid breaths, heaving and kicking at the boulders along the sands and shaking the dark grasses.

"Yes," said Barnes moving a black checker, "Jewell would have ked tonight. Just listening to the waves crashing up against the oulders."

The table shook despite Loyd's leg against it, "Mabel would probably liked it too, but more at home with the tin roof."

Loyd moved the last of the red checkers into the king's row as the antern shook rigidly, standing first on one end, then the other. The rain flew in on them. "King me," said Loyd, and the both of them laughed as the swell snatched the checkers from the table and tossed them into the wind.

Old Lady of September

*she must live in September
walk thru brown leaves by the morning;
smell them burning
in the roadside ditches, come evening,
watch them buried by the rake.
grey pines, tinged in green;
blue skies, painted black and grey.
she watches
from the window where she sits
each afternoon.
waiting for the first snowfall,
the last flake from the painted sky
to come, and cover the leaves.*

Paul Hicks

The Putting to Bed of Azariah Tolstig

*They sat the old folks in the sun
in lawn chairs
on the fresh-mown grass*

*the old women talked of patchwork
the old men talked about Verdun*

*All of them stared at the ground,
hid their eyes from the sun,
and watched the small black ants
move in and out among the blades of grass;
bumping into stones.*

*They sat the old folks in the sun
an hour or two each evening
to let them watch the cars go by
to let them see their children wave,
beyond the chain link fence.*

*They sat the old folks in the sun
before they brought them in
and put them all to bed.*

Paul Hicks

